

Testimony in opposition of:

House Bill 2250: AN ACT concerning education; creating the student empowerment act; authorizing the establishment of education savings accounts for certain students to attend private schools of their choice

**Submitted by:
Richard Martinez**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Richard Martinez and I am a lifelong resident of Topeka. My wife and I have four children. The first 3 attended parochial grade school and high school in Topeka and our youngest daughter, Grace, attended Topeka Public Schools. Grace has Down syndrome and was a graduate of Topeka High School, class of 2021.

We wanted to send Grace to the same parochial school as her siblings. They were ready to welcome her with open arms if we would pay for a paraprofessional directly. The school would not provide any speech, physical, or other therapies that Grace needed to succeed. There were too many conditions that prevented Grace from attending our parochial school as did her older siblings. To say she was welcome there would not be accurate.

It is critical that HB 2550 be amended to include provisions that direct the private school to accept all students and meet the requirements in any Individual Education Plan (IEP) in the school setting, if the student uses a voucher as described in the bill. This amendment creates a fair bill, levels the playing field, and would allow parents who wish to send their child with extraordinary needs to a private school as long as the private school has the supports in place. Anything less is simply not fair to students with extraordinary needs.

It is my experience based on our three oldest children, that private parochial schools are well funded. The parochial school is considered a ministry of the church. As a ministry of the church, it is not dependent on outside monies to educate their parishioner students. **I have concerns about using state dollars to support a religious based education.**

There are provisions in the bill, New Section 5, that add even more administrative burden to the schools. **I think it would be less of an administrative burden and cost to streamline the process that allows parents to proactively pursue interest in the voucher and remove the requirement that the school must notify parents of eligible students.**

Lastly, New Section 7 has provisions in it to permit an administrative fee from 2.5% to 5.0%. Quite frankly, admin fees of this percent are exorbitant. A typical admin fee on a managed retirement account is around 1%. The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) account, which is an individual account currently managed by the state treasurer, has fees at or under .37%. **The administrative fees in the bill should be significantly reduced.**

By the way, Grace was voted Prom Queen last May. Think about that for a moment. At one of the largest schools in Kansas, her classmates voted her Queen. I could not be more proud of Grace and Topeka High School.

I urge you to oppose HB 2550 as it is written. Please reach out to me with any questions. Thank you for your time today.